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Mary Eckerson HB 5120

This is my third time testifying in support of this particular bill. HB5120, requiring the Department of Children and Families to provide financial support to children adopted through the foster care system prior to 2005. My name is Mary Eckerson and I have adopted five children through the foster care system in CT

My first two times testifying I told you the very compelling story of my two oldest boys. Today I could tell you about my daughter who is now a senior in high school, instead, let's just agree that any child who has been a part of the foster care system who has successfully completed high school and is now ready for college is somehow a tale of triumph.

Today I would like to focus on nuts and bolts.

Last week I filled out the FAFSA form for my children who will attend college next fall. At the end of the form are several questions which would qualify the applicant for additional Federal Funding. One. Is the applicant the first person in their family to attend college? No, can't check that box, although not one of their biological parents attended college. 2. Was the student in foster care at the age of thirteen? No, can't check that box, all my children were adopted before the age of thirteen. 3. Is the student currently in legal guardianship? No, can't check that box either, you know why, my children were adopted.

Why is this important?

If a student is in foster care or legal guardianship or was a foster child at the age of thirteen, they can apply for Federal Financial Aid as an independent thereby becoming eligible for a tremendous amount of Federal Grants.

I have spent the last two years searching for scholarship money for my children, I did not come across a single opportunity for children adopted through the foster care system.

Finally, because I adopted my children through the foster care system prior to 2005 they are not eligible for any assistance from DCF.

So, I am sure that you are seeing the theme that I am developing here, because I adopted my children, they have become ineligible for Federal, State and private aid.

My husband and I were foster parents for fifteen years. Many times over the years people have said to me "How can you do that, I could not get attached to a child and then have them leave." Well, perhaps a better question would be, "What happens if the child can't leave?" What happens when, after one, two, three years of foster care the child needs a permanent home? My husband and I never hesitated, of course, the child that we had loved and cared for would continue to be part of our family. We figured the rest would work itself out. Well, we are having a little trouble working it out, which is why we are asking for your help.

Please help us finish the job we started together. When we took these children into our home, they were wards of the State, you all were their parents, then we adopted them, now we need your assistance again. Please fight for these children as if they were your own, because they were, they are as much your success stories as they are mine.